

ROBERT BROWN'S BASS STRAIT JOURNAL OF
APRIL/MAY 1802

(Embracing landings from the *Investigator* at King Island and
Port Phillip.)

Transcribed by J. H. Willis and Coryl I. Skewes* from a Microfilm
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April 21, 1802.—We were in sight of land supposed to be the
island discovered by Mr. (?) Baudin and also of the shores of N.S. Wales.

April 22.—The island which was 2 or 4 leagues to windward
possesses a most unfavourable aspect, sandhills of considerable height,
behind which the ground somewhat higher was covered with apparently
. . . trees of many of which the dead trunks stripped of their barks alone
remained.

April 23.—About 3 o'clock anchored about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the
island opposite to some low rocks which project a little way from the
sandhills and were under . . . of the island the only rocks visible. After
dinner I accompanied C. Flinders on shore and staid about an hour.
A species of seal different from what we had before met with was seen
and one killed. This I did not see, but by the account I received it is
most probably new. The cranium of an animal of this (?) kind was also
found with very large canine teeth. Two wombats were killed, a kan-
garoo possessing most of the characters of the . . . but scarce half the
size, intermediate between that and the brush kangaroo, it was whitish
on the underside of the neck and breast; it was a female with a young
one in the false belly. I walked a little way into the brush but was
not able, even had time permitted, to penetrate far. I found a few
plants which we had not seen on any other part of the coast, as *Styphelia
acerosa*, *Fabricia levigata*, *Casuarina stricta*, etc.

April 24.—At daylight went on shore and remained till 10 o'clock.
I got over the first rising ground behind the sandhills, after crossing
another, but less deep hollow, found myself near a fresh water lake
of no considerable size, probably not much above $\frac{1}{2}$ mile in circum-
ference. The water was highly coloured by decay and vegetable matter
. . . in the descent to the lake there were thickly wooded . . . The
trees in general (?) small but have often . . . trees of species of *Eucalyptus*
of very (?) many different sizes, some of them equal to any we had
seen hitherto in New Holland. They were in various stages of
decay, some of them still having branches or bark, others fallen and

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almost entirely decayed, the decay commencing at the centre and proceeding to the circumference. Mosses, lichens and fungi covered them. The ground was in general moist, in some places marshy, and in all places in the neighbourhood of the lake covered with a rich mould formed almost entirely of decomposed gum-trees. The wombat we killed and another was shot by Mr. Bell. The dung of emus was found pretty frequently. They appear to feed strictly on the berries of *Styphelia acerosa*. Tracks of large kangaroos were said to be seen, and the skull of a small animal with large canine teeth, 8 small incisors and 6 grinders in the upper jaw was found. I conjecture, notwithstanding the size of the canine teeth, that it may be a species of New Holland opossum. I observed several new plants today and, among others, 2 small tree ferns, etc.

Prin. Flor. King Insul.

[Remainder of page left blank, apparently for an intended list of King Island plants.—J.H.W.]

About 11 o'clock got under way and stood for the water of N.S. Wales considerably to the westward of Western Port, the same . . . were a few leagues distant from it. The land, very high, was to be seen at 14 leagues from the (?) deck.

April 25.—Wind failed. Barometer still high, nearly 30" 60; the land continues high.

April 26.—Continued our course along this coast. About 2 o'clock were opposite to a bight, the entrance to which narrow and the extent of the bight not seen. Notwithstanding the forbidding appearance of the entrance and the shoal water, not more than 8 and 6 fathoms without it, we stood into it and deepened our water somewhat, the sounding continuing regular from 7 to 10, near 10 fathoms for a considerable way up, and we now found ourselves in a very extensive sound which at first was suspected to be Western Port of Mr. Bass, although nearly a degree farther to the west; but as we discerned, the appearance of the bay convinced Captain Flinders that it could not be that port, as it appeared to have only one opening whereas Western Port has a double opening, an island being situated in its mouth.

As we advanced, we saw rippling on each side of us and other indications of shoal water. Our object was to get near the east side of the bay and to anchor opposite to the highest point on that side. About 5 o'clock the ship got aground in 2 fathoms, partly I believe in consequence of the man in the starboard chains calling out 4 fathoms, when he had only three, and in consequence of there being no master at three. She remained in the same position and swinging a little. We had but little shore water on any side, 16 feet being the most that the master found anywhere in the neighbourhood. The kedge anchor was now after two hours taken ahead and dropped in three fathoms, and the ship with no great difficulty worked up to it. In about 4 minutes she struck again, her head resting in about 10 feet while she had 12 or 14 feet astern, and on her larboard bow. She was got off in about 15 minutes, and fortunately we got into deep water and anchored in 10 fathoms.

April 27.—About half past 9 o'clock a.m. left the ship, accompanying Captain Flinders in the cutter, to go with the intention of getting upon the hill N. of the ship. We landed at the bottom of the hill, the distance from the ship about 6 or 7 miles. Except for one place about 2 miles from the shore, we had water enough for the ship to within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the shore, having generally about 6 fathoms, sometimes up to 11 and even no bottom with the hand line.

Afternoon. We ascended the hill which was neither distant or difficult, remained on the top, beckoned to the boat, dined there on oysters found at high water mark on the beach! After dinner, left the shore and got on board the ship about 7 o'clock.

Where we landed, the land near the shore was flat but for no great extent. The soil rather light and sandy, but the trees had attained a considerable size, and both they and the shrubs had a healthy appearance. Here we saw a species of *Banksia* forming a tree of very considerable height and girth. As we ascended the hill, the soil improved, deepening and containing a much smaller proportion of sand. On the top of the hill, it was fully as good as on the sides. The trees on the top also were larger than the ones seen on the ascent; the largest were *Eucalyptus*. *Exocarpaceae cupressiformis* was frequent there, forming small trees with straight branches. A species of *Mimosa, foli. supra decompositis*, and a species of *Banksia* were the most frequent trees.

Our view of the bay was very extensive from the top. In one direction (about N.W.) it was so extensive that we could not see its termination. The water seemed to shut the high and very distant scene in this direction. On the opposite side of the hill we could see an inlet, apparently shoal branched and of considerable extent. It was nearly due east and might (though it didn't very well answer the description of that place) be Western Port. The valleys on each side of the hill, especially that towards the N.E. had a very pleasant appearance, in some places being thickly clothed with wood, in others nearly bare of wood but covered with a bright green verdure, and in others bared spots of a brownish colour were seen. The hill consisted of a very fine grained granite of a reddish-grey colour . . . *vid. specs.*

No other marks of natives, but that of fires, burnt trees and oyster shells scattered in the woods in the lower ground, were met with. The prints of dogs' feet and those of kangaroos were seen. Many birds were seen and heard, and Captain Flinders thought he heard the notes of all at Port Jackson. The *Psittacus Banksii*, a new white-crested species, *Merops carunculatus*, *Merops nov. sp.*, *Corvus corax*. On the beach a few shells not seen before, chiefly trochus. Oysters we found in considerable numbers thrown up to high water mark on the beach; they were very large and excellent. Mussels, but more sparingly, we also found in the same way.

Mr. Good, who landed opposite the ship, observed nearly the same plants as I had found. At the hills he found the soil good, and from his account and what we could see from the hill that part seemed to resemble very much the bottom of the hill where we were. Mr. Bauer

found the short club of a native. It resembles those of the natives of Port Jackson which they call "waddis" and was . . . with circles of zig zags equidistant and pretty regular. The surface where grasped was made rough. Mr. Foster saw several black swans. *Pelicanus bic*[. . .] and *Pelicanus* [. . .] *remigibus reetricibusque nigris capite dilute* (?) *testaceo* with the common pelican were seen but not in considerable numbers.

April 28.—At 7 got under weigh, at 8 anchored again. About 10, got under weigh and at 3 once more anchored about 2 miles from the hill we ascended yesterday.

April 29.—The Captain left the ship in the cutter, proposing to examine more particularly the bay, and taking provisions for three days.

In the forenoon the ship got under way in order to get down as near the point as possible, there to wait the return of the Captain. We got within our former tract, and got aground once there. It appeared, however, to be a deep bank and we got over in a few minutes. We now stood back for the situation we had left and again came to an anchor about half way between where we grounded and that place.

Messrs. Wahl, Bell and Good went on shore in the afternoon proposing to remain all night, in case of the night getting down, to walk along to the point the following day.

April 30.—In consequence of the wind being foul the ship remained in her present situation, the channel being far too narrow for beating down. In the evening the party that went on shore yesterday returned. They had seen no natives and of Quadrupeds only one native Dog. Of birds they shot a few that we had not seen before. A var. of the Banksian Cockatoo with yellow cheeks and had (?) *Charadrias bil*[. . .] . . . *Psittacus Ham*[. . .] . . . Mr. Good found several plants in flower which we had not previously seen. They found fresh water in several places near the beach, abundance of oysters on the beach.

May 1.—In the previous afternoon, Mr. Bauer went on shore. He found scarce any plants we had not before seen. In the afternoon the ship got under way and without grounding got down a considerable way, and as far as known past the shoals. Remained on board.

May 2.—After breakfast I landed on the south shore opposite to the ship and about a mile or mile and a half from the entrance of the Port. The country here consisted of gentle swells and hollows, pretty uniformly covered with grass and in many places rather thinly furnished with trees which grow, either the *Banksia* formerly observed or *Casuarina equisetifolia* and *Mimosa odoratissima*, forming small trees. Besides the grass which forms the greater part of the verdure, some of the herbaceous plants examined in the meadow land as *Geranium ple*[. . .], *Convolvulus*, *Scavola*, *Picris*, *Glycine lacin*[. . .], etc.

Towards the opposite shore, within a direct line . . . and half a mile distant, the hills were more sandy and covered with low shrubs as *Fabricia*, *Correa alba*, *Croton aff. viscida*, and a few dwarf *Styphelias* and *Styphelia lanceolata* . . . here but a shrub, but in less . . . and more fertile situations forming a small tree. The soil on the slopes of the hills was rather light and sandy but a tolerable depth. In the hollows

it was deeper richer and black, in some places approaching to Bog. We observed the recent dung of Kangaroos but neither saw the animal itself or any Quadrupeds. Very few birds were seen.

After remaining about an hour and a half on shore, returned on board and at 12 o'clock left the ship for the north shore, which we reached about 2 o'clock. We landed a little below the ship on a very narrow neck of land which we crossed and in the inlet saw many black swans. We could not get within certain shot of them, and it appeared that all of them could fly.

The soil on the neck of land and its vegetable productions were principally like those of the opposite shore. The low cliffs on the shore on both sides were calcareous, not containing shells. The only plant I had not previously seen was *Statice exal* | | The shrubby *Salicornia* I found in flower . . . Traces of natives we found in several places. In one the ashes of their fire with boughs on the windward. Here we found a number of cockle shells, a few fish bones and shells of cray fish, with several pieces of bark open at each end and more turned in at the sides, of about a foot or a foot and a half in length. We supposed they were for carrying water, which is not to be found in this neighbourhood. They would contain not more than a pint and a half.

We got on board at sunset. The Captain had returned an hour before. He had sailed around the Bay in the cutter and landed in several places. It is not quite so extensive as from the view we had of it from the hill ascended on the 27 April we had supposed. There being a considerable tract of very low land in front of the hill which the water appeared to skirt—the most considerable hill Capt. Flinders ascended, its distance from the beach was supposed about 10 miles. It is composed of coarse grey granite, exposed in blocks on the summit. Captain Flinders had intercourse with the natives whom he described as apparently better fed and fully as intelligent as those of K. G. Sound. Many of them had the skins of Kangaroos in the same manner as those at K. G. Sound. They paddled with their arms very readily, noticing to wind for any (?) return. They were much pleased with a present of 2 shags which C. Flinders had before given them. Their women were left out of sight.

May 3.—At 7 o'clock got under way, drop and down to the mouth of the bay. Most of the day and during the whole night had a fresh gale.

May 4.—In the morning were abreast of Wilson's Promontory, having been carried on considerably by the westerly current. This promontory consists of very high land, rising with distinct mountains in some places. A very remarkable high hemispherical island lies off it at no considerable distance.

May 5.—In the afternoon were in sight of land supposed to be Cape How.

[Note.—Much of the journal is scribbled on poor paper and is exceedingly difficult to decipher; smudging has rendered some parts illegible. In the foregoing transcription, uncertain words are prefixed by a query (in brackets) while dots indicate that a word or words could not be deciphered. In a few instances, where Brown has used binomials that still remain unpublished (for plants and birds) the specific epithet is deliberately part-spelt in this transcription, so as to render it ambiguous.]